

Week of 3/15/2020-3/21/2020 (3/17/2020)

- Well, it's St. Patrick's Day, but it seems like no one feels lucky especially when the global pandemic of coronavirus COVID-19 quickly spreads across the world. It's meant to be spring break, but it feels more like fear lurks everywhere and there is nowhere to escape from it. This is especially shocking that this is happening in the 21st century. I never imagined something like this to happen especially considering the advancement of medicine that we have reached up to this point today. As a pre-medical student, I have planned to take the upcoming MCAT exam at the end of April, but now they're starting to cancel examinations up until mid-April. I hope I am not affected through this process, because a slightest delay in taking the MCAT will delay my whole application process. I already feel disappointed after hearing my graduation ceremony might be cancelled this spring. I don't want to feel disappointed again, so I hope this "social distancing" can flatten the curve, as the news claim will help stop the spread of COVID-19. That is the hope I have for now moving forward.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 3/22/2020-3/28/2020 (3/25/2020)

- It has been a little over a week since Americans have been self-quarantined. I kept getting calls and texts from my friends that they are feeling down during this time of self-isolation. The infectivity of COVID-19 has led to the decrease of mental health for many during this time. It seems hard to handle being at home especially when you can't socialize with your friends. It was announced 2 days ago that President Trump is planning to lift the self-quarantine and reopen American businesses soon. I think this is a terrible idea, because statistics show the numbers of COVID-19 cases has not been showing any sign of going down. Numbers keep rising, especially in hotspots in the country, like New York, Washington, and California. We have about 54,000 positive COVID-19 cases, half of which come from New York. The whole purpose of social distancing was to "flatten the curve" so the healthcare system is not overwhelmed. If social distancing measures are removed, then the number of cases would rise exponentially and many would die due to lack of resources in the healthcare system. Not to mention, there are a lack of resources for healthcare workers themselves. Although medical research on creating faster diagnostic methods and vaccines is underway, the process is long because it has to undergo several testing methods and approved through various administrations. Policy is just as important as the medicine in this time and I think the government is not doing its best to work through this crisis. I think the self-quarantine should have been implemented in the beginning of the crisis rather than a month later. We would not be the nation with the third-largest number of positive COVID-19 cases if that were the case. I hope things get resolved soon before more people are put at risk.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 3/29/2020-4/4/2020 (3/31/2020)

- It is Tuesday, so it is officially my first day of online classes. I typically do not have classes on Monday like most do, so I started to begin my online classes after the 2-week break was over. I had training to use the zoom app because I will be teaching chemistry through zoom later this week. It was interesting to get used to this new technology because I am used to using the chalkboard every time I hold my chemistry sessions. Online classes are almost like asynchronous meetings because students and professors come on at the same time and have lecture or discussion together. Some of my professor opted for online lecture recordings, which helped me so I can pause them and take notes along the way to absorb all of the material. I was intrigued at the creative ways professors are handling their online classes. I really value my education, so it is a shame to see this happen in my last semester of college, but nevertheless, I'm glad online learning can be used as a replacement for the time being. I totally understand the need of social distancing now more than ever. COVID-19 cases keep growing in the U.S. We have recently become the county with the highest number of COVID-19 cases with approximately 180k cases, surpassing China and Italy. As a student going into the medical profession, I am thankful for all of the healthcare workers putting their lives at risk as they battle this virus. I would like to join this team of hard workers in the healthcare profession fight against future outbreaks, once I have the necessary training. For now, I will do my part and continue to stay home and practice social distancing.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 4/3/2020-4/11/2020 (4/10/2020)

- I finished 2 weeks of online classes. It is crazy to think this has become the new normal as I have been in my house since March 21. Last time I left my house, I went to the grocery store and there were only 2 loaves of bread left on the shelves. All beans were gone, as well as the soaps, sanitizers, and of course, the toilet paper. Ever since Governor Larry Hogan announced the stay-at-home order on March 30, it still seems scary that this has become our life right now. I applied to a job to work as a medical scribe in the Emergency Department at Baltimore Washington Medical Center (BWMC) beginning from the end of May. I am not sure if that will still be the case, but the thought of it makes me a bit nervous. Living with my grandma, I am worried that I could potentially catch COVID-19 as I start working there. Although if I do end up having to work there soon, I plan to take every necessary precaution possible. Me and my grandma currently share a bathroom, so I would just move to my things to the basement bathroom so minimize contact. I have talked to several people and looked at the example other healthcare professionals are setting to think of ways that I can best protect myself because that would be the best way to protect others as well. I know it must be ironic that I want to enter the healthcare profession, yet I am feeling this anxiety about working during a pandemic. I think it would be easier if I was living alone, even if I would talk the same precautions. For now, I can still continue being grateful for all the healthcare workers being strong through this global pandemic.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 4/12/2020-4/18/2020 (4/14/2020)

- Today is my birthday and I still remain at home. All is well, but it is getting a bit cramped in this space, I decide to go wear a mask, get on my bike, and go out for some exercise, which was much needed. Nothing special planned for today, but my mom decided to make a nice dinner and bake a cake at home. It was still pleasant even though we couldn't go out to celebrate. A couple days ago, I also got an email response asking me if I am ready to start working at BWMC. Quite frankly, I am not. I was worried out of my mind that I would be in a high-risk zone and then have to come home and possibly put my grandma at risk. I felt guilty of feeling this way, but I think it was in my best interest due to my current situation to postpone the job until after I graduate. There have been signs the curve is flattening, and I hope that is the case to give hope to millions of Americans. I know it is starting to get to a lot of Americans because the unemployment rate is rising. It is a good thing the stimulus bill is coming tomorrow.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 4/19/2020-4/25/2020 (4/23/2020)

- Two days ago, it was my brother's birthday and tomorrow it is my friend's birthday. It seems to be like a celebratory week, yet there are no celebrations because of COVID-19. It was announced that Governor Larry Hogan will be making an announcement tomorrow regarding the stay-at-home order. Several states are starting to ease restrictions based on their governor's call. Personally, I do not think this is a good idea because although there have been fewer cases, they may start to rapidly spread again once several states start opening. There have been people protesting in several states, including Maryland, to re-open the states. A lot of people have concerns because they are unemployed, but some seem to be offensive to an extent. For instance, I saw a picture of someone holding a sign saying to reopen the states and sacrifice the "weak". I thought this was unacceptable because I have my own concerns with protecting my grandma, who is vulnerable especially in this situation with a history of respiratory illnesses. I am sure it would be like this for several others as well and it will make the efforts of all healthcare workers go to vain if states rapidly start re-opening. The curve may be flattening, but that does not mean that all cases are gone. It is also possible the outbreak may restart and spread rapidly the second time. There also has been news going around that COVID-19 will have another outbreak in the winter, as it started like that the first time in China. Talks about a vaccine are going around, but it is unlikely that they will have it ready by the end of the year. I just hope people start to understand the seriousness of this pandemic and take the proper precautions without acting irresponsibly.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 5/10/2020-5/16/2020 (5/11/2020)

- This is my final week of classes at the University of Maryland, and I do feel nostalgic after spending the past 4 years here. I did not think my last time on the campus would be before spring break, thinking that I would come back and see my friends again. On the bright side, most of my friends at the university are in-state and nearby, so once the pandemic eases down and social distancing is not our norm, I will be able to celebrate with them again. It seems that there has been a recent trend towards easing restrictions and opening states back up again across the U.S. Although I do understand the financial impact many families are facing through the country, I worry that this action will only exacerbate the current health crisis we are facing. The protests might be done for those who are feeling uneasy about the current tensions of the economy, but at the same time, that creates a bigger risk by putting others at danger in the current pandemic we are living in. There may not be hope until there is a vaccine found, but considering the long process it takes for undertaking laboratory research along with clinical trials, it might be some time before it is widely available. Until then, I hope there isn't anymore news regarding the encouragement of doing UV light therapy, taking hydroxychloroquine, or injecting disinfectant, because I assure you, the health experts are pleading you to not mind those false assertions.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel

Week of 5/17/2020-5/23/2020 (5/19/2020)

- Earlier this week, I received my cap and tassel in a care package sent by the university. I was supposed to graduate in 2 days, but it will be celebrated at home. It does sadden me that after 4 years of hard work I will not be able to celebrate my graduation and say farewell to my friends for the last time. Graduation is a big deal to me because I value the education that I received and worked hard to receive. Although, I do understand the circumstances and I do hope to go to the winter commencement ceremony next semester. As I reminisce about the past 4 years I spent at the University of Maryland, I found myself thinking about the memorable times I spent with my friends, but at the same time, the breadth of knowledge I have gained from my professors. College was a journey that allowed me to become more open-minded and enlighten myself by understanding social issues in a deeper context. After being exposed to the inequity of society myself, I began to understand why it is important to gain awareness of these topics. This has led me to have several experiences and register for several classes to allow me to gain a better understanding and different perspectives of sustainability, encompassing environment, equity, and economy. As I graduate with a B.S. in Biological Sciences and a minor in sustainability, I continue to seek out how certain measures taken in both healthcare and sustainability can improve the world.
- Peace and esteem, Puja Patel